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Discussed is the nature of stereotypes and their relationships to prejudice and discriminatory behavior. Stereotypes are defined as sets of beliefs, usually stated in the form of categorical generalizations, which people hold about members of their own and other groups. Such beliefs are usually oversimplified and seldom correspond with objective facts. There is high agreement on the traits used to describe particular minority groups; for example, Jews are shrewd or mercenary. People of diverse ethnic and national origins tend to stereotype members of particular groups, such as Negroes, in similar terms. Members of minority groups frequently stereotype themselves in much the same manner as others stereotype them.

It is pointed out that stereotypes, like languages, are learned in interaction with others and undergo a developmental process. The basic sources of stereotype diffusion are parents, relatives, educators, and playmates.

Schools should establish a comprehensive program of intercultural education. Teachers can discourage stereotypes by increasing awareness in their students of the kinds and degrees of group differences.

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THE MEANING OF STEREOTYPES

JAMES W. RINEHART

The author discusses the nature of stereotypes and their relationship to prejudice and discriminatory behavior. Mr. Rinehart is a fellow in the Department of Sociology and Anthropology at The Ohio State University.

> We were now large enough for the white boys to fear us and both of us, the white boys and the black boys, began to play our traditional racial roles as though we had been born to them, as though it was in our blood, as though we were being guided by instinct. All the frightful descriptions we had heard about each other, all the violent expressions of hate and hostility that had seeped into us from our surroundings, came now to the surface to guide our actions.
>
> Richard Wright, *Black Boy*

THREE distinct but interrelated components of hostile intergroup relations are captured in the opening quotation—feelings, beliefs, and behavior. Social scientists have applied their own labels to these components, and have made each, singly and in combination with the others, a frequent and continual target of theoretical and empirical investigation. *Prejudice* is customarily defined as a feeling of hostility toward the members of racial, nationality, and ethnic groups; *stereotypes,* as the beliefs people have about such members;

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and *discrimination,* as the differential manner in which people behave toward them. This paper is devoted to a discussion of several important aspects of one of these components—stereotypes.

What Are Stereotypes?

Stereotypes are sets of beliefs, usually stated as categorical generalizations, that people hold about the members of their own and other groups. These beliefs are ordinarily oversimplified and seldom correspond with the objective facts. The act of stereotyping involves the attribution of a set of traits to members of social groups. They are described, for example, by their physical appearance (Jews have large noses); their intelligence (Negroes are stupid); or their personality (Japanese are sly).[1]

Stereotypes furnish rationalizations for feelings of hostility and provide cues about how one ought to interact with minority-group members. This can be exemplified in a perhaps all too familiar remark: "I don't like Negroes and I don't want them to move into my neighborhood *because* they are dirty, trashy, and stupid." It is apparent that the epithets *dirty, trashy,* and *stupid* are operating to justify prejudice and potential discrimination "intellectually." They are the reasons given to explain why one acts and feels as he does. Used in this manner, stereotypes serve to perpetuate prejudice and discrimination.

On the other hand, stereotyped beliefs learned prior to feelings of hostility may be sufficient to engender prejudice and discriminatory behavior. A child learns the negative meaning of such words as *nasty* and *dirty* before he hears the words applied to a particular group. Hearing a group described as nasty and dirty may of itself evoke reactions of hostility toward that group. In this sense, stereotypes may be important factors in the formation of prejudice.

Several studies have shown that stereotypes distort perception and interfere with rational judgments. For example, children were administered the following item as part of a silent reading test:

> Aladdin was the son of a poor tailor. He lived in Peking, the capital city of China. He was always idle and lazy and liked to play better than to work. What kind of a boy was he: Negro; Chinese; French; or Dutch?[2]

The majority of the children gave Negro as their answer.

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[1] Stereotyped beliefs are also commonly held of *categories* of people—for example, politicians, teachers, Texans, women drivers, and teenagers. It should also be noted that the content of a stereotype does not always bear a negative connotation.

[2] Reported in Gordon W. Allport, *The Nature of Prejudice.* New York: Doubleday and Company, 1958, p. 186.

One of the characteristics of a stereotype is that it is often phrased in such a way as to attribute a peculiar set of traits to *all* members of a group. Beliefs cast in this "all or none" form are based on the following logic: All Jews are shrewd; Joe is a Jew; therefore Joe is shrewd. While the deductive process is logically valid, the first premise, "All Jews are shrewd," must be based on the examination of *all* Jews to be logically true. The existence of one Jew who is not shrewd is sufficient to render the first premise untrue; hence, the conclusion that Joe is shrewd is untrue. Since trait differentials among groups are differences of degree, we can be reasonably certain that beliefs stated in an "all or none" form are fallacious.

While beliefs about people are often of this categorical nature, they need not be so to qualify as stereotypes. Beliefs expressed in terms of *many, most,* or *the majority* are also stereotypes to the extent that many, most, or the majority of the members of the group in question do not possess the particular set of traits attributed to them. When stereotypes take this form, we are inevitably led to determine the extent to which they actually agree with the distribution of traits among members of the stereotyped group. Available scientific evidence suggests that such differences of trait distributions that do exist between groups are indeed very slight and certainly do not warrant most of the group's members being characterized in similar terms. The few "real" differences that are known to exist among groups are generally not selected for inclusion in stereotypic beliefs.[3]

While stereotypes may be based upon a "kernel of truth," truth is neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition for their existence. Several studies have demonstrated that stereotypes may arise without any basis in fact whatsoever.[4] It is also known that there is only a very slight relationship between the degree to which people agree upon the traits they assign to a group and their familiarity with and knowledge about the group.[5] For example, research subjects who reported never having seen a Turk and admitted to

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[3] For information concerning group differences, *see* L. E. Tyler, *The Psychology of Human Differences.* New York: D. Appleton-Century, 1947; Otto Klineberg, *Race Differences.* New York: Harper and Brothers, 1935; Otto Klineberg. *What Is Race? Evidence from Scientists.* Paris: UNESCO House, 1952; Allport, *op. cit.,* Chapters 6 and 7.

[4] *Cf.* Richard T. LaPiere, "Type Rationalizations of Group Antipathy," *Social Forces,* December, 1936, *15,* 232–37; Norman Daymond Humphrey, "The Stereotypes and Social Types of Mexican-American Youths," *Journal of Social Psychology,* August, 1945, *22,* 69–78. Indirect evidence for this point can be found in Nathan Schoenfeld, "An Experimental Study of Some Problems Relating to Stereotypes," *Archives of Psychology,* No. 270, June, 1942.

[5] Schoenfeld, *op. cit.*

little or no knowledge about Turks were often willing to agree that they are cruel and warlike. Before applying a set of categorical labels, people generally do not stop to examine the data that do exist concerning real group differences and the nature of such differences.

Prevalent Group Stereotypes

A great deal of research has been focused upon the kinds of traits used to describe minority groups and the frequency with which people agree with one another. The first study of this kind was carried out in 1933 by Katz and Braly, who asked university students to select from a list of 84 traits those they felt best described several ethnic, racial, and nationality groups. Germans were characterized by 78 per cent of the students as scientifically minded and by 65 per cent as industrious; Jews were viewed by 79 per cent as shrewd and by 49 per cent as mercenary; Negroes were characterized by 84 per cent as superstitious and by 75 per cent as lazy.[6]

Since 1933, the content and distribution of stereotypes among persons all over the world have received continual attention from social scientists. The majority of studies of stereotypes have yielded results roughly similar to those found in the earlier Katz and Braly investigation. From these studies the following conclusions can be drawn concerning the extent of agreement on stereotypes, their content, and distribution: (1) There is high agreement concerning the traits used to describe particular groups. (2) People of diverse ethnic and national origins tend to stereotype the members of certain groups, such as Negroes, in similar terms. (3) Members of minority groups frequently stereotype *themselves* in much the same manner as others stereotype them. (4) While similar traits are sometimes applied to several groups, in general the stereotypic depictions of groups are mutually exclusive.

Two frequently stereotyped groups in America are Negroes and Jews. Research subjects have commonly assigned the following traits to Negroes: mentally inferior, immoral, superstitious, emotionally unstable, overassertive, given to crimes of violence, lazy, occupationally unstable, musical, and happy-go-lucky. Jews are commonly believed to be: shrewd, mercenary, industrious, grasping, intelligent, ambitious, sly, clannish, overaggressive, extravagant,

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[6] Katz, Daniel, and Braly, Kenneth. "Racial Stereotypes of One Hundred College Students," *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology,* December, 1933, *28,* 280–90. Stereotypes not only vilify out-groups but glorify in-groups. In the Katz and Braly study, the five most frequently chosen traits for Americans were industrious, intelligent, materialistic, ambitious, and progressive.

proud, rich and powerful, in control of business and finance, unscrupulous, and overbearing.[7]

Only minor differences have been found between stereotypes held by high-school students and those held by college students and other adults. For example, 87 per cent of a group of high-school students regarded the Negro as ignorant, 84 per cent as happy-go-lucky, and 81 per cent as lazy.[8] A tenth-grade student from a small Midwestern town in which only one Jewish family resided stated: "I don't like Jews. In one way they are smart—this is in making money. Many Jews are now running America. I don't think they should be allowed to do this, later they will want to run the whole world."[9] In a recent nationwide study of 2,000 high-school students, 28 per cent agreed that Jews have too much economic power, and 12 per cent felt that Jews are overprivileged. Approximately one-half of the students accused the Jews of staying apart and excluding others from their social life.[10]

Development and Maintenance of Stereotypes

Stereotypes, like languages, are learned in interaction with others and undergo a developmental process. While children in their early years can often distinguish between themselves and members of some minority groups, they are unable to apply descriptive labels to these groups. If a child does apply a label, it is generally idiosyncratic—i.e., it will seldom coincide with labels applied to the same group by his peers. As the child advances in age and in school, his beliefs about minority-group members become more definite, less idiosyncratic, and more in agreement with the beliefs of others.[11]

Once it is realized that stereotypes are learned and undergo a process of development, it becomes important to know from whom

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[7] Among the many studies which have reported or elicited stereotypes of Negroes and Jews are Katz and Braly, *op. cit.;* Bruno Bettelheim and Morris Janowitz, *Dynamics of Prejudice: A Psychological and Sociological Study of Veterans,* New York: Harper and Brothers, 1950; Allport, *op. cit.;* Kimball Young, *An Introductory Sociology.* New York: American Book Company, 1934 (especially pp. 158–63); Howard J. Ehrlich, "Stereotyping and Negro-Jewish Stereotypes," *Social Forces,* December, 1962, *41,* 171–76.

[8] Blake, Robert, and Dennis, Wayne. "The Development of Stereotypes Concerning the Negro," *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology,* October, 1943, *38,* 525–31.

[9] Radke, Marian, and Sutherland, Jean. "Children's Concepts and Attitudes about Minority and Majority American Groups," *Journal of Educational Psychology,* December, 1949, *40,* 449–68.

[10] Galtung, Johan. *What the High School Students Say: A Survey of Attitudes and Knowledge about Jews and Nazism.* New York: Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith, 1961.

[11] For evidence bearing on this point, *see* Blake and Dennis, *op. cit.,* and Radke and Sutherland, *op. cit.*

they are learned. The answer can be found primarily in the child's network of interpersonal relations. Individuals responsible for the socialization of the child, such as parents, relatives, and educators, are basic sources of stereotype diffusion, along with siblings, classmates, and neighborhood play groups. Other potential sources are movies, television, magazines, and school textbooks. While it may be somewhat surprising to educators that the educational system has been implicated as a partner in the diffusion of stereotypes, a recent UNESCO-sponsored study of European and Canadian school children revealed that approximately 15 per cent of the responses of the children pointed to teachers, textbooks, and course work as the source of their stereotyped beliefs about others.[12]

To understand that stereotypes are learned in interaction with others only partially explains their continued existence. We must ask not only where they come from but also why individuals are so prone to hang on to them once they have been learned.

First, common perceptual and thought processes protect categorical beliefs. Beliefs about minority-group members ordinarily are not based upon actual observation of the members themselves. These images, then, are preconceived, and as such, may prevent the recognition of characteristics that are incompatible with the stereotype. Either deviations from the stereotype are not perceived, or they are distorted to *fit* the stereotype. In addition, the incompatible instance may not be perceived in terms of his membership in the stereotyped minority group but rather in terms of his membership in other categories or groups. For example, it may be that a highly intelligent Negro doctor is not thought of primarily as being a Negro but rather as a member of the occupational category "doctors," to which his "non-Negro" characteristics are more typically suited.

Finally, if the incompatible instance can neither be distorted nor shuttled off to another category, the stereotype may be regarded *as if* it were an empirical generalization—i.e., a proposition based upon actual observation. The incompatible instance is, then, regarded merely as an exception to the rule, but an exception which in no way alters the stereotype, since empirical generalizations allow exceptions.[13]

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[12] Lambert, W. E., and Klineberg, Otto. "A Pilot Study of the Origin and Development of National Stereotypes," *International Social Science Journal*, 1959, No. 2, *11*, 221–88.

[13] For a more comprehensive discussion of these phenomena, *see* Maurice N. Richter, Jr., "The Conceptual Mechanism of Stereotyping," *American Sociological Review*, October, 1956, *21*, 568–71.

To further understand the pervasiveness of stereotypes, we ask: What, if anything, do persons gain from holding them? Stereotypes may function as symbolic expressions of group identification and belongingness. Within groups, certain attitudes and beliefs (sometimes of a prejudicial and stereotypic nature) and norms and values are expressed; each member is expected to believe and act in accordance with these standards. The individual identifies with and espouses the group's viewpoint as a means of continued membership in and acceptance by the group. In addition, the more nearly the individual behaves in accordance with the standards of the group, the more status he will be accorded by the group members.[14] In short, the expression of stereotypes may facilitate one's acceptance by and continued membership in the group in addition to enhancing his relative standing within it.

Another important function of stereotypes is that they enable the individual to think about and act toward minority-group members in an oversimplified, nondifferentiated manner. Allport says, "If I can lump thirteen million of my fellow citizens under a simple formula, 'Negroes are stupid, dirty, and inferior,' I simplify my life enormously. I simply avoid them one and all. What could be easier?"[15]

In addition to simplifying behavior, the use of stereotypes also simplifies the thought processes. Fishman notes:

> There seems to be a real difference between analytic, differentiated, and directed thinking or reasoning on the one hand, and the autistic, emotional, uncritical, memory-and-recognition thinking of stereotyping on the other. In stereotyping it almost seems as though the individual either judges not at all, or does so only via well-worn, dependable, swiftly traversable channels which require a bare minimum of defining, distinguishing, inducing, weighing of evidence, or any other of the so-called higher mental processes.[16]

Implications for Education

It is apparent that the processes of stereotyping and stereotype assignment are in several important respects inimical to the basic ideals of our educational system. Two primary aims of education are the transmission of substantive information and the develop-

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[14] This statement is a well-verified sociological proposition. *See* George C. Homans, *The Human Group*. New York: Harcourt, Bruce and Company, 1950.

[15] Allport, *op. cit.*, p. 20.

[16] Fishman, Joshua A. "An Examination of the Process and Function of Social Stereotyping," *Journal of Social Psychology*, February, 1956, *43*, 34–35.

ment of the capacity to reason logically and on the basis of sound evidence. Stereotypes subvert these goals; they stand as the antithesis of both sound reason and accurate information.

To the extent that persons categorically generalize about racial, nationality, and ethnic groups, the knowledge they transmit is erroneous. It is based upon fallacious logic and is not justified by facts. Stereotypes encourage and produce nonrational thought. Rational thought requires the individual to seek, sift, and evaluate evidence. Stereotypes, in contrast, furnish ready-made, oversimplified answers to complex problems. They also distort perception and impede rational judgments.

Another goal, to which the educational system has attached increasing importance, is the inculcation of democratic values. One major aspect of democracy is the granting of equal rights and privileges to all people. Stereotypes, as vehicles of prejudice and discrimination, indirectly serve to maintain patterns of behavior that obstruct a just distribution of rights and privileges.

What can the schools do about stereotypes? Apart from establishing an all-out program of intercultural education, teachers can discourage stereotypes by being aware of the kinds and degrees of group differences. Armed with such knowledge, they can take care not to stereotype or accept stereotyped statements on the part of their students. Textbook descriptions of racial, nationality, and ethnic groups, including Anglo-Saxon Americans, are frequently phrased in stereotypic terms. These oversimplifications should be called to the attention of the student and his knowledge of the group in question supplemented through classroom discussion. A simple rule of thumb that teachers can employ when speaking of both minority and majority groups is to qualify their statements with the adjective *some* in place of *all*, *most*, etc.

Given the early and pervasive influence of the family in the formation and maintenance of stereotypes, the school can hardly hope to erase stereotypes completely from the thoughtways of its students. Nevertheless, it should not initiate, substantiate, and accentuate stereotypes. In light of its goals, the educational system seems obligated to stand as a bulwark against stereotypes and the types of mental processes involved in stereotyping.

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